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Following two years of probing into reasons for local failure in teaching Latin-American students, the author began an intensive teacher-training program, with changes in teacher attitude as its first goal. The phases of language theory and methods covered in the training included developing an understanding of the intimate relationship between a culture and its language; a limited contrastive analysis of the sound, structure, and vocabulary systems of English and Spanish; oral drill techniques with practice and suggestions for classroom use; suggestions for adapting texts provided by the State, with emphasis on sound and structure drills from the text selections; and sequencing of the introduction of new structural elements. The author considers the most obvious affirmative result to be the disappearance of many of the attitudes of complacency and defeatism on the part of the teachers, and stresses the fact that second-language teaching has been carried on effectively overseas for many years. (AMM)

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Priorities in Instituting the Teaching of English As a Second Language in a Southwest Texas School

Robbie Choate Cooksey

This is the history of a small step one Texas school took toward better education for Latin-American students who had been denied the equality of opportunity which is America's traditional promise. This simple story is told for the encouragement of other schools which must begin their journeys to educational equality at the same point. For this one began, as theirs must, from a point of almost total disregard of the second-language problems of a ninety percent Spanish-speaking student body in a district which at that time was still using instructional methods and texts identical to those of schools whose total school population were native speakers of English. It is possible that taking the first small step required more determination and singlehearted effort than will many of the miles yet to go.

To understand the sequence of steps taken, one must know the local conditions which dictated priorities. The following are elements of the local situation as I saw them after I had been in the district as supervisor for two years.

The teachers were not trained in second-language teaching. Faculty members laid the blame for the poor academic progress of Spanish-speaking students at the doors of their parents: "They'll never learn to speak English if they don't speak it at home!" This frequently-voiced suggestion for solving the language problem, offered with a straight face, registered a lack of training, an unawareness of the nature of language, and a necessary hardening of the heart toward the plight of the children. Hardening was necessary if a teacher was to return day after day to a defeating classroom.

As in many schools of this area, the faculty was marked by its number of non-degree teachers, its many teaching outside their fields of training, its many who had had no fresh college training for ten, fifteen, or twenty years, and its large annual turn-over in staff. One or two teachers held membership in professional organizations other than the Texas State Teachers Association and the Classroom Teachers Association, both of which must be classified, on the local level, as being essentially politically-oriented rather than curriculum-directed bodies. When I first came to the district, there was no local supervision and no inservice training program. The word was *laissez faire*, i.e., indifference coupled with and encouraged by administrative non-interference which both reflected and reinforced the prejudice existing between the socially and economically dominant Anglo minority

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AL 001 591

and the Spanish-speaking majority. Truth, even when moderated by compassion, realistically spotlights these conditions of six years ago.

School statistics, compiled in the fall of 1965, reveal the damage done by language deficiences, educational deprivation, and poverty—a syndrome of disability which seemed destined to perpetuate itself endlessly.

SYSTEM-WIDE DATA ON EDUCATIONAL DISABILITIES
SHOWN IN PERCENTAGES BY GRADES

Grade	*Over-Age*	*Below Grade*	*Inadequate in English*	*Spanish-Speaking*
1	40%	13%	95%	96%
2	56%	35%	88%	95%
3	64%	48%	88%	94%
4	66%	45%	84%	92%
5	74%	59%	64%	91%
6	69%	60%	88%	94%
7	73%	71%	45%	91%
8	66%	63%	57%	88%
9	65%	39%	52%	86%
10	67%	45%	62%	85%
11	54%	28%	52%	77%
12	60%	64%	60%	75%

Grade—Current Grade Assignment
Over-Age—Percentage of children one year or more older than normal for assigned grade
Below Grade—Percentage of children testing one year or more below the assigned grade level in all English language skills
Inadequate in English—Percentage of children with deficiencies in English language skills so marked as to handicap their participation in class
Spanish-Speaking—Percentage of native speakers of Spanish

Such disturbing statistics, translated into the living faces of boys and girls defeated by their world, demanded action. Yet, there had to be first a very great desire to salvage the Latin-American child. There had to be a desire great enough to reckon the cost of, and be willing to pay for, possible failure; schools in this tip of Texas are frequently the battleground for local political factions, and roots of bitter factionalism feed on the differences in culture and language. Because of that climate, school personnel who wish to remain in the district appear indifferent to local inequities while wearing the protective coloring of the dominant faction.

Realistic willingness to try for change was the first necessity. Following two years of probing into the depths of local failure, desire to effect change hardened into determination on my part as supervisor. Together with determination was the disturbing certainty of my inadequacy. Searching for possibilities of bringing education to our children, I began an intensive study of second-language teaching with a book salesman's gift copy of Nelson Brooks' *Language and Language Learning*.[1] References in Brooks led to other books; their footnotes and bibliographies led to others, and

[1] (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960.)

challenging possibilities began to appear. Without formal training or guide, my search was without plan; and, while persistent, it was not unlike the burrowing of a gopher crisscrossing his tunnels in the dark. The search could have been easier, but it could not have been more exciting or rewarding. Since its beginning four years ago, many books have joined Nelson Brooks on my shelves; but the first three which were studied—perhaps a curious trio—are treasured: English Language Services' *English This Way*, Book 3,[2] Robert Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures*,[3] and the Boggs-Dixson *English Step by Step with Pictures*.[4]

While trying to learn the best theory and techniques of second-language teaching, I assessed the hazards of beginning a broad program of teaching English as a second language from preschool through grade twelve. My decision was that no program could get off the ground as long as the faculty maintained its defeatist attitude, complacency, and seeming contentment with a fourth-rate education for the Spanish-speaking child. Working under the assumption that the temporary defeat of the teachers was due in large part to lack of training and absence of challenge, I decided to begin an intensive teacher-training program, with changes in attitude as its first goal. I believed there could be no better way to initiate change in teacher attitude than to involve them in the joy of language discovery. In training meetings, I forced teachers to take their own language out of its category of unconscious habit. As they explored its complexity, rigidity, and flexibility, they gained respect for the grip it has on the user because of habit. The speech of five-year-olds demonstrated how native language is learned, as well as the firm grasp the child may have of both structure and sound before he attains school age. Specific structural patterns in English and Spanish were contrasted, using as illustrations errors heard daily in the school halls or encountered repeatedly in student compositions:

> This peoples have move.
> He appreciated me to help him.
> He didn't had some pencils, too.
> Does she lives here?
> You like to study, isn't it?
> My father was content of the work.
> Bill asked whether can the old cars start.
> The govern was sick all more for a year.

As teachers realized the reasons for a Spanish-speaker's making errors similar to these, they grew in tolerance; and the old solution, "They just need to speak English at home," was heard less frequently. The idea was emerging that language cannot be originated out of simple desire to communicate and that one can produce only what one has been taught.

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[2] (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963.)
[3] (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967.)
[4] (New York: Latin American Institute Press, 1956.)

During the year and a half since this effort was begun, inservice training has remained the heart of the program. It has never been a sophisticated type of inservice with "name" speakers or university teams imported as trainers. That was not possible. It has been, simply, that as I learned, I taught. A prompt transfer of learning was attempted, usually in small group meetings by levels—primary, intermediate, or secondary—in an effort to give each what seemed immediately useful in both theory and methods. Also, as quickly as possible, the best of instructional materials and equipment was purchased, and a materials-and-training center was established where teachers could become acquainted with both before their placement in the classrooms.

Almost immediately following the earliest training, secondary language arts teachers began using tape recorders and headphones with commercially prepared tapes for English as a second language, intermediate teachers began using oral drills from *English This Way*, and primary teachers taught non-English-speaking five-year-olds for ninety minutes after school each day. The after-school classes were necessary because there was neither space nor teachers to hold classes during the regular day. Extended exposure to spoken English was provided in our community by showing free at night, during the regular term and in summer, standard movies in English rented for that purpose.

It would be foolish to state that all teachers applauded this program, all learned what was presented in inservice meetings, all tried new language techniques in their classes, all dropped cherished superiority illusions and displayed new warm regard for the Spanish-speaker and his culture. It would be equally incorrect to state that the program of teaching English as a second language did not lift off the ground. After the first year's four-month effort, response on the part of alert intellectual leaders and the faculty was encouragement enough to validate another year of training and trial.

As in the first four months, inservice training gave direction, cohesion, thrust, and heart to the effort, even as it expanded the teachers' understanding of second-language teaching. Phases of language theory and methods which were covered in this training included the intimate relationship between a culture and its language; a limited contrastive analysis of the sound, structure, and vocabularly systems of the two languages; oral drill techniques with practice and suggestions for their use in class, including methods for a judicious control of student origination of utterances beyond their point of training; some ideas for adapting to the needs of second-language learners the texts provided by the State, with emphasis on preparing sound and structure drills from selections in those texts; and good sequencing of the introduction of new structural elements. This last was particularly difficult for teachers to grasp because of the brevity of their training and the great gulps of new information they were force-fed in haste. Sequencing information offered the teachers was that which I obtained in a step-by-step comparison of the order in which new structures are introduced

in five currently available texts for students of English as a second language. Much of the success of this inservice program has to be credited to the new receptivity of most teachers, their continuing spirit of willingness, and their high interest. Of help also was the feeling abroad that our small district led this area in beginning to break through the second-language barrier to education, that it alone was definitely training teachers in second-language teaching, and that it had the only K-12 second-language program in the area.

Some success was measured in the classrooms. Administering locally-prepared tests of oral language proficiency to all students in grades four through twelve proved that we needed more skill in making tests. However, they also seemed to provide enough valid results to justify our selecting some specific structures as instructional goals for grades four through six. After ninety-six days of instruction directed at these goals, our post-tests indicated that the pre-test disability of 85% had been cut to 31%. Informal teacher evaluation of the effectiveness of the entire program has been encouraging. The most obvious affirmative result, in my opinion, has been the disappearance of much of the attitude of complacency and defeatism, and replacement by fresh-blowing winds of enthusiasm, enterprise, and expectancy. Many successes seem suddenly possible and surely are possible any time an intelligent corps of teachers is informed and challenged.

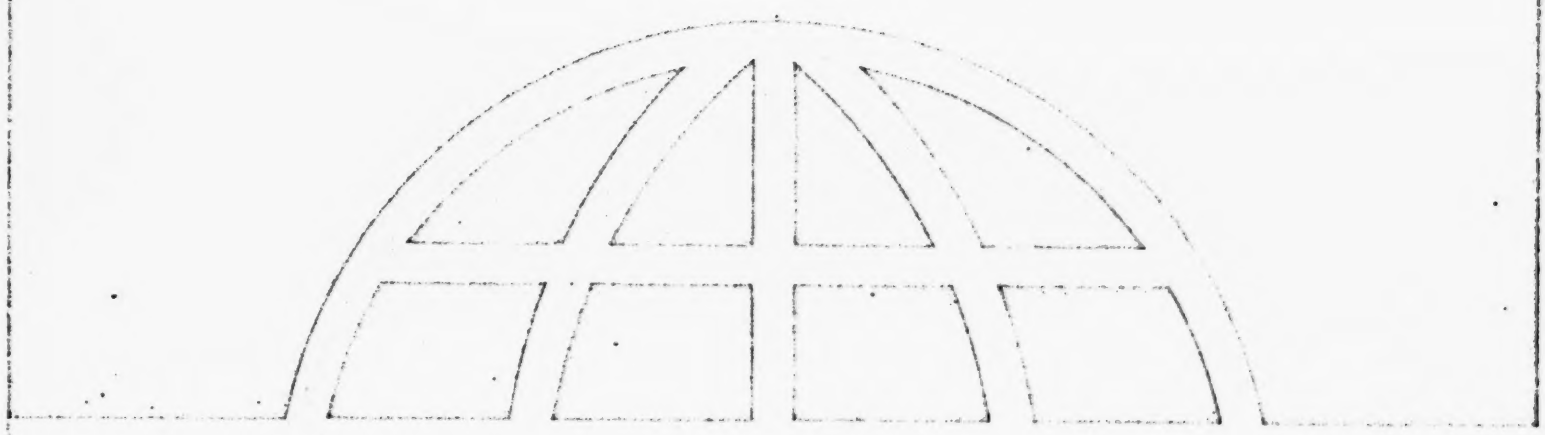
Witness to the new spirit is an attempt by secondary English language arts teachers to write a curriculum guide which will actually try to reach each student at his exact level of language ability and bring him forward along the full continuum of language skills to a point of proficiency commensurate with his native ability. No one can fully appreciate the terrifying difficulties of writing such a guide if he has not had to try teaching English to the conglomeration of extreme language abilities and disabilities confronting the teacher of our secondary classes. At present, it seems that the guide will be as fresh and novel as is the effort. For there are no guides available to copy—none, that is, which provides guidance for teachers who have in one class students ranging from the completely non-English-speaking to native speakers of English whose proficiency with their language is far above that of their assigned grade level. That local teachers see the need for such a realistic guide, and will attempt to develop one, is indication that change is already inside the door.

In review, the priorities for instituting a program to teach English as a second language in this school were the priorities necessitated by the local social-political climate, the mood and competency level of the faculty, and the lack of language training on the part of the one instructional supervisor. Such local restrictions dictated this order of needs: (1) leadership concern so great as to sustain the effort of self-training and to reckon the need worthy of the risk involved in attempting a vigorous school-wide program; (2) training and challenge for the teachers; (3) selection and procurement of the best materials and equipment; (4) decision as to extent of the attack, i.e., how many students to teach and in what grades; (5) testing for dis-

ability, selecting objectives, teaching for change, and post-testing; (6) reappraisal of methods, materials, and inservice training; (7) maintenance of the high level of interest and effort necessary for a continuation of the program. If this last need can be met, despite the loss of key supervisory personnel and the influx of untrained new teachers, there is a possibility for full two-language competency for Latin-American students in this school and for their scholastic achievement in other fields—an achievement which has had to wait upon language development.

If the effort can be maintained, such success is possible. There remain, however, dangers to success in this tip of Texas. There is danger in a rejection of personnel whose vision and drive forced a beginning. There is danger in a re-ascendancy of those on the school board who see in power the promise of return to the "Old South" idyll of a decade ago when Anglos, fat in their egos and bank accounts, sat comfortably on the stooped back of uneducated Latin poverty, whose fourth-rate education was guaranteed by prejudicial policies. There is danger in the Spanish-speaking citizen, with attention and energies totally engaged by his own rising expectations, permitting the replacement of concerned and aggressive educator-administrators by political administrators. There is a peculiar danger in the reappearance of the administrative lullaby of *laissez faire*. In the heat-soaked lethargy of the Southwest that song, like the high-frequency incessance of cicadas in the mesquite trees, drugs the mind and dulls the heart's resolve.

One reality forced itself to the front during the length of the program. It is the reality which prompted my writing of this account—the truth that a full solution, even to its own language problem, cannot be made by any one school district. The extreme mobility of school populations in this area of winter homes for migrant farm workers and the culture-language cohesion of the Latin-American people make necessary a coordinated, systematic area-wide attack, rising out of each local school. For one school to give realistic attention to the language needs of four levels of disability in its secondary English classes is good; but it is not enough. For one school to admit the inadequate training of its faculty and attempt to make up the deficit by specialized inservice programs is good; but it is not enough. Pupils move; teachers move. What is needed is not ideas endlessly discussed in area meetings, nor small spot experiments in scattered classrooms, but an admission that second-language teaching has been done effectively overseas for many years. For students who are here today and in the fields tomorrow is the answer high-level conferences carried on with detached placidity? Or regional elbowing for grants and promise of publicity while the season runs out in the classrooms? The thousands of students pouring out of our schools year after year, fully equipped for failure, demand the immediate bold implantation of established second-language techniques into classrooms manned by trained teachers, even if those teachers must be trained on the job and as they perform the job. This has been done in nations overseas who have seen their need. Why cannot it be done here?



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